UNITED
NATIONS

A S

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/53/460
S/1998/917
5 October 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-third session
Agenda item 62
QUESTION OF CYPRUS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-third year

Letter dated 2 October 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, and further to my previous letters, the latest dated 16 September 1998 (A/53/399-S/1998/864), I have the honour to bring to your attention additional documented information regarding the continuous, systematic and well-executed plundering of the rich religious, historical and cultural identity of the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus.

For 24 years now, the copious archaeological and religious treasures of occupied Cyprus have been plundered and looted at will. The recent documented evidence presented below is but a link in the long chain of thefts, vandalism, desecration and profanity directed at eradicating the religious, cultural and historical character of occupied Cyprus and thereby altering a civilization that has endured for more than 8,000 years.

More specifically,

The Church of Agia Anastasia, Lapithos, built in the nineteenth century in place of an older, smaller church, which contained icons from the eighteenth century, has been stripped of all its icons, religious artifacts and other revered treasures, such as bibles, crucifixes and chalices, and has been rented in order to be converted into a casino.

Furthermore, the adjoining guest rooms in the churchyard and the nearby school have also been rented and will be converted into a hotel in order to complement the adjacent casino.

The devastation of the cultural and religious heritage of occupied Cyprus by Turkey is very extensive, well known and well documented. In an article in the prestigious New York Times dated 1 April 1998 entitled "Greek Orthodox Church Icons Ravaged in the Turkish Part of Cyprus", Judith Miller and

Stephen Kinzer write the following: "These scenes [of theft and looting] reflect what European police investigators now say is one of the most systematic art looting operations since the ... Second World War. The looting of Greek Orthodox churches in Northern Cyprus, where Turkish troops landed in 1974, has brought hundreds of magnificent art works onto the international art market ..."

Furthermore, in a special report entitled "Church Treasures from Cyprus" published in the July/August 1998 issue of the respected Archaeology magazine, Mark Rose, the managing editor, begins with this very disturbing sentence: "After the occupation of northern Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974, looters stripped the [occupied areas] churches, removing ... frescos and mosaics dating from the fifth to the sixteenth century, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 icons, and thousands of chalices, wood carvings, crucifixes and bibles." These conservative numbers testify to the extent and volume of the crimes being perpetrated against the cultural patrimony in occupied Cyprus.

It is regretful that while humanity honours and celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Turkey continues its relentless campaign with the objective of destroying the rich cultural and religious treasures of occupied Cyprus, treasures which are a part of the World Cultural Heritage.

It is ironic that at a time when the United Nations is striving to improve existing international conventions for the protection of the world cultural properties and Governments are determined to work together to enable the heritage of humanity to be passed on to future generations, Turkey is resolute in its campaign to destroy even the last vestiges of the rich historical and religious culture of occupied Cyprus. The occupying Power should be made accountable and fully answerable for these new illegal acts. Simply stated, the international community should stop tolerating this unacceptable situation of religious intolerance.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 62, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sotirios ZACHKEOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative